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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

TERRORIST BEHEADINGS:
CULTURAL AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

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ABSTRACT

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     Taking hostages and ritually beheading them has recently emerged as a popular terrorist tactic for radical groups. Using camcorders and the Internet, any group can mount an international media event at the tactical level that has tremendous strategic impact. Terrorists hope to strike fear into the general populace and weaken the resolve of those who might support the global war on terrorism. The terrorists' actions also have tremendous cultural and symbolic significance for their audience. Killing hostages is not new, but the growing trend of the graphic murder of noncombatants impels us to study this tactic.

     The research paper defines terrorism; reviews the history of ritual murder, human sacrifice and terrorism as a tactic used by religious groups and focuses on the cultural significance, motivations and objectives of these groups. Historical trends in hostages and American foreign policy are examined. Terrorist beheadings in Iraq are described and analyzed, and political rituals in democracies and the Middle East are discussed. Finally, the paper provides policy recommendations for strategic leaders and planners to utilize as they assess and develop effective defensive and offensive countermeasures to this tactic.

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TERRORIST BEHEADINGS: CULTURAL AND STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

Taking hostages and ritually beheading them has recently emerged as a popular terrorist tactic for radical groups. Hostages are taken when dramatic results are desired, ransoms are being demanded, or when there is some urgency to the hostage-taker's needs. In unstable and insecure environments such as Iraq, hostages can be easily obtained. Using camcorders and the Internet, any group can mount an international media event at the tactical level that has tremendous strategic impact. Terrorists hope to strike fear into the general populace, in order to influence political decisions and weaken the resolve of nations and individuals who might support the global war on terrorism. Their actions also have tremendous cultural and symbolic significance for their audience, which includes other insurgents, potential recruits, and local citizens. Killing hostages is not new, but the growing trend of the graphic murder of noncombatants impels us to study this tactic.

DEFINITIONS

The Defense Department defines terrorism as "the calculated use of unlawful violence or threat of unlawful violence to inculcate fear; intended to coerce or to intimidate governments or societies in the pursuit of goals that are generally political, religious, or ideological."[1] "To execute" has been defined as "to inflict capital punishment on; to put to death according to law."[2] "Ritual murder" is "the murder of a person as a human sacrifice to a deity."[3] "Murder" implies a crime, while "execution" implies a judicially-sanctioned punishment, but today's kidnappers blur the distinctions between the two.

RITUAL MURDER, HUMAN SACRIFICE, AND RELIGIOUS TERRORISM

Anthropologist David Kertzer analyzed ritual and symbolism in societies throughout history, believing that an understanding of ritual and symbolism is crucial to understanding the politics of a culture. He states emphatically:

> "Politics is expressed through symbolism. Rather little that is political involves the use of direct force…To understand the political process, then, it is necessary to understand how the symbolic enters politics, how political actors consciously and unconsciously manipulate symbols, and how this symbolic dimension relates to the material bases of power...ritual is an integral part of politics in modern industrial societies; it is hard to imagine how any political system could do without it."[4]

Ritual murder, motivated by religious convictions, is an ancient tactic used to create terror. The names of murderous religious groups such as Jewish Zealots, Muslim Assassins and Hindi Thugs entered the English language as words to describe terrorists.[5] In his seminal study of

"holy terror", David Rapoport says that religion provided the only justification for terrorism until the early 19th century.[6] That period saw the end of divine, monarchical rule in Europe, followed by the emergence of nationalism and self-determination. In the last half of the 19th century, various schools of radical political thought, embracing Marxist ideology, anarchism and nihilism, transformed terrorism from a mostly religious to a predominantly secular phenomenon.[7]

Human sacrifices were commonly performed to appease the gods, ensure victory in battle, or guarantee a bountiful harvest. In the Old Testament, Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac, only to be stopped by an angel of God. The Aztecs perfected ritual as a way to intimidate other peoples. On special occasions such as the dedication of a new temple, the Aztecs invited neighboring dignitaries to observe the rites, which always included human sacrifice.[8]

In 1979, terrorism as a tactic used by religious groups re-emerged with the Islamic revolution in Iran. Other religious groups quickly followed suit. According to a 2002 National War College report, a new trend within Islamic radicalism was the advent of the violent opposition of salafi extremists to other sects of Islam, branding them as traitors to the pure and true faith. One example was the brutal campaign waged by the Pashtun Taliban against the Hazara Shiites in Afghanistan.[9] The Taliban had differing rituals, traditions, and law, and were ethnically distinct from the Hazara.[10] The Taliban did not consider the Shiites to be true Muslims because of their distinctive doctrine of the imamate. The Shiite imam is more exalted than the Sunni imam, whose primary function is to lead prayer. The imamate refers to a group of male spiritual leaders regarded by the Shiites as descendents of Muhammad divinely appointed to guide humans.

The War College report coined a new term to describe the global terrorism threat--"pansurgency"--which it defined as a strategy to "incite worldwide insurgencies to overthrow Western ideals and replace them with a new world order under radical views of Islam."[11] Unlike some other world religions, Islam is highly decentralized, with no central authority or ruling body to uniformly interpret the Quran's guiding principles. The radicals' goal is a regional hegemony, with cooperation among the various groups. The report cited six global terrorist groups which support the creation of an Islamist Palestinian state in place of Israel and the elimination of U.S. influence in all of the Middle East.[12] Since the report was published, new groups should be included who share these goals.[13] Although there has been a resurgence in groups using religious arguments to justify terrorist tactics, it is important to note they also have political, nationalistic or cultural motivations and their behavior is driven by ideology.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

"Capital punishment" derives from the Latin word "capitalis" meaning "head', since in ancient times a death sentence typically meant the offender lost his head.[14] To place the beheadings in context, it is instructive to look at the methods and meaning of capital punishment over time. Unlike ritual murder or human sacrifice, capital punishment is imposed according to the rule of law. It represents the ultimate decision of power over the individual—the taking of life itself. Many cultures believed execution was more humane than long-term imprisonment. It also was costly to feed and house prisoners, and they might escape or be rescued.

The history of execution is filled with symbolism and conflicting themes. When mercy was desired, a quick and painless death was granted. If the crime was heinous (such as murder, witchcraft, treason or heresy), the maximum suffering and deterrent effect were called for through a prolonged and agonizing death like burning at the stake or drawing, hanging and quartering.[15] The form of execution was also tailored to social status, nationality and sex (either commoner or royalty, citizen or foreigner, male or female). The ancient Romans considered beheading to be less dishonorable and painful, so they beheaded citizens while crucifying non-citizens.[16] In Britain beheading was reserved for nobles convicted of treason or murder, while commoners were hanged.[17]

Beheading's symbolism make it an ideal deterrent. Many societies revered the head as the seat of wisdom and consciousness, believing it must be connected to the body for the soul to pass into the next life. Without it, the spirit would wander as a restless, headless ghost, as in Washington Irving's tale, "The Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow." The head is also the only body part which, when removed, can be easily identified as belonging to that person. Relatives and friends naturally react with fear and revulsion after gazing upon the severed head of someone they know. The Old Testament contains famous stories such as Judith beheading Holofernes and Herod ordering the beheading of John the Baptist. Western kings and Muslim caliphs continued the tradition by displaying opponents' severed heads on platters or pikes.

Terrorist beheadings have deliberately been painful. In contrast, judicially-sanctioned beheadings can be quick and relatively humane, but there are inherent physical problems. First, it requires a skilled headsman to accurately and powerfully strike the right spot to sever the head, since the muscles, vertebrae and spinal cord of the neck are tough. Second, the prisoner is usually blindfolded so he does not see the axe or sword coming and move at the crucial moment. In beheading and guillotining, an assistant often held the prisoner's hair or head to prevent them from moving. Finally, the results are extremely gory as blood spurts from

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the severed aorta and veins of the neck. No doubt these factors led to the abandonment of beheading in recent decades by most countries that used it. [18]

Saudi Arabia is the only country to still use decapitation as a form of death penalty, [19] basing it on the kingdom's strict interpretation of Islamic Law. Most Muslim countries use the firing squad or hanging in official executions. In 2003, Saudi Arabia decapitated 53 individuals (52 men and 1 woman) for crimes such as homosexuality, murder, rape, armed robbery and drug trafficking.[20] The Saudi executioner uses a curved sword in a public square, and the event occurs almost weekly on the Sabbath (Friday), in the afternoon, after prayers.[21] An account of a Riyadh beheading in 2000 demonstrates the powerful rituals involved.[22] First, policemen clear the square of traffic and lay out a thick blue plastic tarp about 16 feet square. Next the condemned man is led out, dressed in his own clothes, eyes covered. He has been given tranquilizers. He is barefoot, feet shackled; hands cuffed behind his back and then forced to kneel in the center of the plastic. An Interior Ministry official reads his name and crime before the witnesses. A soldier hands a long-curved sword to the executioner, who approaches from behind and jabs the prisoner in the back with the tip of the sword, so he instinctively lifts his head. The executioner then severs the head with a mighty blow. Paramedics place the body in an ambulance and the blue plastic is taken up.

In June 2004, two terrorist beheadings occurred almost simultaneously: the decapitation of Paul Johnson, an American contractor in Saudi Arabia and Kim Sun-il, a South Korean contractor in Iraq. In reaction, the Saudi Institute published an article denouncing the Saudi practice of public beheadings as barbaric and a source of inspiration to the terrorists.[23] Muslim and Arab organizations have emphasized that the beheadings do not enhance the temperate and moderate expression of Islam.

Well into the 20th century, most executions were public spectacles. Botched executions, as well as a desire for more "scientific" techniques, led to supposedly less cruel methods and inventions such as the guillotine, firing squad, electric chair, gas chamber, and lethal injection. Most states are moving towards lethal injection as the method of choice. Outside the United States, many countries hold that capital punishment contravenes universal standards of human rights, and is a form of torture. Consequently, non-dramatic, antiseptic, and "modern" forms of execution are preferred today.

HOSTAGES AND AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY

In understanding hostages and their place in American foreign policy, it is useful to look at historic trends. Russell Buhite's 1995 study of terrorist incidents traces their effect on 200 years

of American foreign policy and the prominent role that hostage incidents played in the administration of several Presidents. Buhite concluded that "No American president of the twentieth century has effectively practiced no ransom/no negotiation; none has utilized swift and "effective" retribution.[24] Even Ronald Reagan, when confronted with the hijacking of a TWA flight to Rome on 14 June 1985 with 122 Americans on board, eventually put pressure on the government of Israel to release many of the 766 Shiites held in an Israeli jail, thus satisfying the main demand of the hijackers.[25] Buhite analyzed the prolonged hostage situations of his and earlier times and concluded that negotiation bought time and saved lives. Consequently, he advocated an adhoc, flexible policy that included negotiation backed by political, economic and military leverage (occasionally using punishing military power). He also advocated support from the international community, sophisticated police and espionage activity, and, most importantly, foresight to keep Americans out of harm's way. [26]

International policy is contained in the United Nations International Convention Against the Taking of Hostages, enacted in 1979, soon after the Iranian takeover of the U.S. embassy in Tehran and the seizure of fifty-two American hostages. State parties shall make hostage-taking a grave offense, take all appropriate measures to ease the situation of the hostage, take alleged offenders into custody and either prosecute the offenders or allow them to be extradited.[27]

From a U.S. policy perspective, combating terrorism is defined as two sets of actions: antiterrorism (defense measures such as awareness training and force protection to reduce vulnerability to terrorist acts) and counterterrorism (offensive measures taken to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism).[28] According to the State Department, U.S. counterterrorism strategy is guided by four enduring policy principles, the first of which specifically mentions hostages. The policies are: "First, make no concessions to terrorists and strike no deals. Second, bring terrorists to justice for their crimes. Third, isolate and apply pressure on states that sponsor terrorism to force them to change their behavior. Fourth, bolster the counterterrorist capabilities of those countries that work with the United States and require assistance." [29] Though the policy forbids negotiation, it allows for dialogue with hostage takers, saying the U.S. Government will make every effort, including contact with representatives of the captors, to obtain the release of hostages without making concessions to the hostage takers.[30]

The *National Strategy for Combating Terrorism*, published in 2003, contains four goals and objectives, which serve as recommended strategic actions.[31] The objectives are: defeat terrorists and their organizations; deny sponsorship, support and sanctuary to terrorists; diminish the underlying conditions that terrorists seek to exploit; and defend US citizens and

interests at home and abroad. Generally, the former two objectives are more offensive in nature, while the later two objectives are defensive in nature.

In the context of U.S. history, the non-negotiation policy doesn't correspond with what most 20th century Presidents actually did when confronted with a hostage situation. The current non-negotiation strategy may cause a lack of support for U.S. interests and personnel abroad. Other countries have apparently recently responded to terrorist demands or paid ransoms to terrorists. On 7 September 2004, two Italian aid workers were kidnapped. A statement released on the Internet from a group called the Islamic Jihad Organization in Iraq threatened to kill the two Italian women if Italy failed to withdraw its troops within 24 hours. The hostages were released, but only allegedly after a ransom of as much as $1 million was paid—a charge which the Italian prime minister denied.[32] In another hostage incident, Amari Saifi, a leader of an Algerian Islamic militant group, told Paris Match magazine that his group received ransom payments to release 32 mainly German hostages they had kidnapped in February and March 2003. Saifi refused to say the exact sum paid, saying they promised not to divulge the amount. The German press speculated that around Euro 5 million (US $6 million) had been paid, but the German foreign ministry in Berlin refused to comment.[33] In light of all this, one writer concluded that, in September 2004, of the more than 140 foreigners taken hostage in Iraq since April, most had been freed, often after the kidnappers' demands were met, and often for financial gain.[34]

The reaction of some European governments to 9/11 is necessarily different from that of United States, which hadn't been attacked in the continental U.S. for over 150 years. There is no evidence the current Bush administration has negotiated with the jihadists. The current political climate makes negotiation very unlikely, given the hard-line rhetoric of the neo-conservatives on the one side, and the brutal beheadings of Americans on the other.

SYMBOLISM OF THE SWORD

The sword is a prominent symbol in many cultures. It has been a cavalry warrior's weapon of choice for hundreds of years. Fine swords were expensive and difficult to produce, so they became the weapon symbolic of the noble or warrior classes who could afford them.

In the Muslim world, the sword's symbolism comes from its connections with the past. In Arab warfare, fighters first fought with lances because they were lighter and less costly; and only later fought with swords. The sword remained the primary symbol of an Arab fighter until the introduction of the rifle (and for large armies, a bayonet was applied at the end of the rifle). Khalid ibn Walid, the great general of the Muslim armies in the Prophet Muhammad's era was called the Sword of God (Sayfullah) just as tribes often referred to themselves as the "sword" of

their leader. Various tribal groups in the Middle East still perform ritual sword dances that mimic battle.[35] To commemorate this heritage, the Omani and Saudi flags feature two curved swords.

The sword is also a prominent symbol in the Quran. *Harb* is the general term for warfare not specifically designated as *jihad*.[36] *Jihad* literally means struggle or offensive war and is frequently defined in English as "holy war". Muslims distinguish between the greater *jihad*, the daily struggle to fulfill the requirements and ideals of Islam, and the lesser *jihad*, fighting for the faith.[37] A Muslim can participate in *jihad* in several ways--by waging war with the heart, tongue, hands or sword.[38] In an analysis of Quranic verses of war, Aboul-Enein and Zuhur note:

> "Specific verses that sanction fighting against persecution are called the **Sword Verses** (emphasis added). Other verses speak of fighting in a just manner, and still others could be termed Verses of Peace and Forgiveness. Certain scholars and radicals taught that the Sword Verses abrogated or nullified the Verses of Peace."[39]

Thus the sword is an important Islamic symbol with many meanings.

TERRORIST BEHEADINGS IN IRAQ[40]

The Iraqi beheadings, or threat of beheadings, generally stemmed from two situations or phases where hostages were seized and videotaped. In the first situation, the demand phase, kidnappers made demands that must be met or the hostage would be killed. In the second situation, the execution phase, the kidnappers either recorded the actual beheading or the aftermath. Sometimes only one phase was videotaped.

The nationality of the victim and the circumstances seemed to dictate whether the terrorists would make any demands or just kill the victim. In some cases it seemed the terrorists deliberately planned to behead the victim and videotape the murder for the terrorizing effect it would create. This motivation was attributed to his captors by a French journalist, Georges Malbrunot, who along with another French journalist was released just before Christmas (22 December 2004) after four months in captivity in Iraq. He said: "On Planet Bin Laden, they look first at your nationality. Had we been British—or from some other coalition country—we would have been decapitated within days."[41] Mr. Malbrunot believed they weren't killed because they were French. They saw other hostages, most of whom were later killed. Fereydun Jahani, an Iranian consul, was to be released, but two Macedonians were beheaded, as was a bodyguard for Iraqi National Congress leader Ahmad Chalabi. Mr. Malburnot said: "We heard them interrogate an Iraqi hostage working on an electricity plant. They divide hostages into two categories—those who are to be executed and those worth entering into negotiations over."[42] Mr. Malbrunot related that their interrogator grilled them and then presented evidence before a

tribunal presided over by a sheikh. He concluded, "The tribunal apparently decided we were worth negotiating over, and on September 2, Christian and I were moved to a better place."[43]

After the Iraq war began, there was a rash of kidnappings. The primary victims were Iraqi citizens abducted by Iraqi criminals and ransomed for financial reasons.[44] In April 2004, as U.S. forces simultaneously attacked insurgents in Falluja and Najaf, two groups—the Islamic Army in Iraq and groups linked to al-Zarqawi—began kidnapping foreigners in order to prevent those countries from sending troops or assisting with the Iraq's reconstruction. These two groups were the main producers of the videos of executions or victims pleading for their lives.[45]

An analysis of media reports and photographs published on the web reveals certain stylistic and ritualistic elements occur again and again. For example, the kidnappers are masked or wear headscarves. They dress in black (like executioners) and hold weapons. A banner advertises the group's name (adding a formal or authoritative tone). In the foreground the prisoner(s) kneel, sit or appear in a subservient or distressing condition. Sometimes the prisoners wear an orange jumpsuit like the Abu Ghraib detainees. There is a reading of "offenses" or "crimes". The prisoner then has the opportunity for "last words" or pleads with the audience to acquiesce to the kidnappers' demands and secure his release.

A photograph of Turkish workers is a representative tableau and demonstrates many of the ritualistic elements.[46] The Turkish workers kneel before militants loyal to al-Zarqawi and they hold up Turkish passports as proof of their identity. Behind them, a banner reads "Tawhid and Jihad"--the name of al-Zarqawi's organization. The kidnapping of the Turkish workers and posting of the videotape were strategically timed to influence political events and weaken the resolve of NATO. The group or its followers had already beheaded an American, Nicholas Berg and a South Korean, Kim Sun-Il. The videotape was aired by al-Jazeera on 26 June 2004; an article with a photo was published 27 June and the next day, 28 June, President Bush visited Turkey for the opening of a NATO summit seeking the alliance's help in stabilizing Iraq. In a written statement, the group demanded Turkish companies stop doing business with American forces in Iraq and called for "large demonstrations" in Turkey against the visit of "Bush the criminal."[47]

We can analyze incidents by grouping them according to whether the victims were non-Muslims, or whether they were Muslims in alliance with non-Muslims.

TREATMENT OF NON-MUSLIMS

A common ritual in many societies, a young man on a journey to "find himself", resulted in one of the stranger beheading incidents. On 31 October 2004, the beheaded remains of a 24-

year old Japanese backpacker, Shosei Koda, were found in Baghdad, wrapped in an American flag. Koda apparently opposed the war and invasion of Iraq. On 26 October 2004 Al-Zarqawi's group posted a videotape message, with a picture of Koda, on the Internet.[48] The kidnappers claimed he worked for Japanese defense forces and they accused Japan of supporting the U.S. They demanded that Japan withdraw its forces from Iraq within 48 hours or he would be beheaded. On 27 October 2004 Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi rejected the demand, saying he would not submit to terrorist threats. When the body was discovered, Al-Zarqawi's group released another videotape, which depicted three men pouncing on Koda and beheading him. The message conveyed was the jihadists believed it was ok to kill non-Muslims who, in their view, supported the U.S.

In May 2004, the beheading incidents first garnered world-wide attention with the killing of Nicholas Berg, which occurred almost at the same time the Abu Ghraib prison scandal photos were published. When the video was released, it was the most popular search item on the Internet.[49] A scene from his execution, posted to an al-Qaeda linked website on 12 May 2004, obviously quotes from published images of public beheadings and the Abu Ghraib prison scandal.[50] It shows the 26-year old Philadelphia businessman in an orange jumpsuit, with his hands tied behind his back, sitting in front of five men wearing headscarves and black ski masks. The video bore the title "Abu Musab al-Zarqawi Shown Slaughtering an American." According to Time magazine, CIA officials said there was a "high probability" the knife was wielded by al-Zarqawi himself.[51]

The linkage between the U.S. treatment of Abu Ghraib prisoners and the slaying of Nicholas Berg was more than visual. The center militant read a long statement, in which he specifically said they had tried to trade Berg for prisoners at Abu Ghraib, but the U.S. government refused. The executioner said, "So we tell you that the dignity of the Muslim men and women in Abu Ghraib and others is not redeemed except by blood and souls. You will not receive anything from us but coffins after coffins…slaughtered in this way."[52] After finishing the statement, the men pulled Berg onto his side and the center figure thrust a large knife to his neck. A scream sounded as the men cut off his head, repeatedly shouting "Allahu Akbar!" or "God is great."[53]

TREATMENT OF MUSLIMS

The press has reported at length about more than 150 Non-Muslims or foreigners kidnapped or killed in Iraq[54], but lesser coverage has been given to attacks on Muslims or Iraqi citizens. Attacks against Muslims seemed to target those who were considered to be in alliance

with, or collaborating with, the Americans or Non-Muslims. An important concept to understand is apostasy, the denying of one's faith in Islam or conversion to another religious creed, is considered to be one of the most serious crimes under Islamic law.

After the interim Iraqi government took over on 28 June 2004, there was an increase of kidnapping attacks on foreigners, which seemed to have the desired effect of causing several companies to remove workers and several countries to withdraw troops and to cease helping with the country's reconstruction.[55] Then in Fall 2004, the focus of the attacks shifted away from foreigners towards the Iraqis themselves, such as police officers, national guardsmen, election commission members, political candidates and prominent government officials. Partisan targets included Shiite and Kurdish citizens and Christian churches. Violence was directed at the Iraqis to lessen support for the interim government, disrupt elections, and continue the chaotic conditions that favored the militants. The militants labeled these Iraqis as "traitors".

A couple incidents illustrate this point. Two Iraqis purported to be National Intelligence Officers, Fadhel Ibrahim and Firas Imeil, were captured in Baghdad's Haifa Street on 28 September 2004. Two weeks later a beheading videotape was posted to the Internet in the name of the Brigades of Abu Bakr Al-Sidiq, a group affiliated with al-Zarqawi's Tawhid and Jihad organization. In the 10-minute tape, the captives identified themselves and when and where they were captured. In the tape, four masked gunmen stood behind the blindfolded captives. One militant said: "It is a disgrace that such a criminal is considered as a member of our nation."[56] Then two other masked men held down Ibrahim and third one severed the captive's head with a knife before holding it up to the camera. Imeil was killed in identical fashion. Before being beheaded, both victims advised fellow Iraqis working in the intelligence, police, National Guard and other services to quit their jobs and "repent to God."[57]

Ansar al-Sunna Army claimed responsibility for several beheadings and released three videotapes between August and October 2004 which showed a Turkish driver, an Arab Shiite Muslim and twelve Nepalese construction workers. On 23 October 2004, a fourth videotape was posted to Islamic websites. The victim, presumably an Iraqi, spoke in Arabic and identified himself as Seif Kanaan. He said he worked as a vehicle mechanic and beverage deliverer for U.S. forces at the Mosul airport. The tape showed Kanaan with his hands tied behind his back, seated in front of three armed, masked militants. Behind the kidnappers was a black banner with white Arabic script bearing the group's name. One militant described Kanaan as a "crusader spy recruited by American troops to follow and carry information about the mujahedeen in Mosul."[58] Shortly before he was killed the hostage said, "I am telling anybody who wants to work with Americans to not work with them. I found out that the mujahadeen have

very accurate information [and] strong intelligence about everything. They are stronger than I thought."[59] A militant then slit the victim's throat, severed his head and placed the head on his back.

EVOLUTION OF THE TECHNIQUE

A couple incidents are interesting because they show the exportation and adaptability of beheading as a technique. In November 2004 there was a copycat beheading of a Buddhist laborer, Kaew, in Thailand. Kaew was the third Buddhist man to be beheaded by suspected Islamic insurgents that year, and the second in retaliation for a 25 October incident when security forces cracked down on a violent demonstration outside a police station, resulting in the deaths of at least 85 Muslim protestors.[60] In a January 2005 incident, a bizarre improvised explosive device was created when militants strapped a booby-trapped bomb onto a beheaded body and blew it up as Iraqi police approached to investigate the corpse.[61] The mind of man is ever-resourceful. Both sides will create new countermeasures and undoubtedly the technique will continue to evolve.

MULTIMEDIA TECHNIQUES

Gary Blunt coined the term "e-jihad" to describe Islamist organizations which use the Internet to propagate a message of religious violence.[62] Since 9/11, jihadists have been very successful in leveraging the Internet to amplify or broadcast their message. The beheading videos are a small part of a larger, sophisticated media campaign which has grown and evolved in a complex way. Early videos included "last will and testament" films of suicide bombers, recording their motivations and enshrining them as martyrs. The videos were played after the attack to claim credit and recruit more martyrs. One beheading video included footage of the surveillance and actual kidnapping of the victim, followed by his confinement, questioning and murder, and thus served as a "how to" or documentary film.

In addition to videos, jihadists are producing and distributing computer art productions, songs and prayers designed to motivate anti-U.S. mujahedeen.[63] Posters or montages of photos glorify al Qaeda operations and encourage anti-US violence. The images are usually embedded in bulletin boards or stored in digital archives, allowing them to be copied and spread quickly across the Internet. The songs, called *anashid,* vary widely in content and origin but typically consist of chanting combined with military sound effects. They encourage suicide operations by calling to mind Islamic conquests of the past or the prestige of Islamic culture.[64] Short audio clips are embedded in threads in jihadist bulletin boards, while high-quality ones form the audio background of multimedia productions like recruitment and beheading videos [65]

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The Iraqis are beginning to develop their own countering media solutions. For example, in February 2005 the Iraqi Interior Ministry and Mosul police chief began broadcasting messages that showed three kidnappers with guns and a knife, preparing to behead a helpless victim. In another scene, one of the kidnappers, now in police custody, declares "I am sorry for everything I have done."[66] A Mosul television station is also developing a program loosely based on "most-wanted" crime shows in the United States.[67]

POLITICAL RITUALS IN DEMOCRACIES AND THE MIDDLE EAST

The Bush Administration and the new Iraqi and Afghan rulers understand the power of rituals to legitimize the government, as do the terrorists. Hence familiar rituals, or their disruption, have become major policy objectives. The Western mass media participates as a primary interpreter and shaper of these events. Political rituals are "made for television events" staged with an eye towards impacting a world audience. To defeat the terrorists, nascent democracies in the Middle East should focus on implementing four rituals.

First, there is the ritual of establishing a democracy through political parties, debates and campaign speeches, popular elections and a constitutional congress. On 7 October 2004, Hamid Karzai became the first freely elected president of Afghanistan. By 30 January 2005, Iraq also planned to hold parliamentary elections, but as the elections drew closer, insurgents stepped up car bombings and the killing of election officials and candidates for office. For example, on 19 December 2004, insurgents brazenly pulled three election officials out of a car in the midst of morning traffic in the heart of Baghdad and shot them point-blank in the head.[68] A key Bush policy objective was to establish an elected democratic, secular government in Iraq, which would then develop a constitution and other structures. After the election, Mr. Bush pledged to reduce the number of American troops in Iraq as soon as possible. The insurgents wanted the elections to fail so the chaotic conditions in which they operated could continue.

Second, there is the ritual of investing the new head of state. On 7 December 2004, Afghan President Karzai was inaugurated in Kabul. A red carpet, lined by soldiers, was spread in front of the former royal palace. Hundreds of foreign dignitaries attended, including Vice President Cheney. The ceremony included a Quranic recitation, the playing of the national anthem and a patriotic song sung by schoolchildren wearing embroidered ceremonial dress. Karzai placed his right hand on the Quran and repeated the oath of office read by the Afghan chief justice of the Supreme Court. Afterwards, Karzai gave an inaugural address.[69] The inauguration ceremony is a modern Western ritual; the proper ritual in an Islamic context is the

bay`a – an oath-swearing allegiance to the ruler.[70] That will probably not occur in Iraq as it does in Saudi Arabia because the coalition wants to create a secular state.

Third, there is the ritual of holding a war crimes tribunal--a powerful symbol in Western society signaling the end of conflict with the trial and imprisonment of former regime members. On 1 July 2004, a war crimes hearing took place immediately after the Americans transferred control to an interim Iraqi government. Ayad Allawi, the interim prime minister, said Iraq needed to put the brutalities of Saddam Hussein's regime behind it, and he wanted to begin the trials of Mr. Hussein and others before the end of the year.[71] In December 2004, the chief judge for the tribunal held formal televised courtroom interviews of two Hussein officials—Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as Chemical Ali, and Sultan Hashim Ahmed, the former Iraqi defense minister.[72]

Fourth, there is the ritual of *shura*, which is consultation via democratically elected representatives who hold open councils with their constituents. *Shura* is the primary way that Muslim rulers gain legitimacy. It allows those with grievances to present them.[73] Even though Iraq's government is now secular, because it is predominantly Muslim, it makes sense to stress the principle of open consultation which coincides with a key aspect of representative democracy. Iraq should necessarily adopt a Muslim political concept because it is a powerful and familiar ritual that can be a bridge towards establishing democratic institutions.

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Ritual is a soft power technique that is part of the Diplomatic or Informational elements of national power. The author advocates a better appreciation of ritual's role in combating the beheadings, but not at the expense of other elements of national power such as Military Force.

- *Continue to implement and improve upon the complementary countermeasures of first, defensively providing strong force protection for coalition forces and contractors and second, offensively tracking down and destroying the insurgents.* The terrorists are trying to kill us, intimidate us, and lessen public support for the war. Logically we must protect our people and allies and fight back.
- *To counter the beheadings, implement rituals to affirm the legitimacy, power, and authority of the new government.* The terrorists want to destabilize Iraq and its government, so the logical countermeasure is to stage stabilizing rituals such democratic elections, investiture of the new ruler and a war crimes tribunal. Where appropriate, adapt Western rituals, or encourage the Iraqis to implement rituals which are uniquely Arab or Muslim, such as *shura*.

13

- *Recognize that beheadings as a tactic have limitations and their popularity will wane as security conditions improve, since the tactic is dependent on unstable conditions. Beheadings, however, will continue to evolve and militants will continue to use the tactic when it meets their needs.*
- *Recognize that the nationality of the victim and circumstances dictate whether the terrorists will make demands or kill the hostages.* Some nations have negotiated the release of their citizens, and in the past, American Presidents had a propensity to negotiate the release of American captives when that was a viable option. The door should be left open for discussions, but the current political climate makes negotiation between the U.S. and the kidnappers very unlikely.
- *Understand the meaning of jihadist multimedia productions, including the cultural nuances. Use this understanding to create countering messages and engage in strategic communications*.

WORD COUNT=5953

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[8] Kertzer, 33.

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[12] Ibid., 11. The six groups were the Abu Nidal Organization (ANO), al-Gama`a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group), Hizballa (Party of God), al-Jihad (Egyptian Jihad), Mujahedin-e Khalq Organization (MEK), and al-Qaida.

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[34] Bennhold.

[35] Sherifa Zuhur, personal communication, 30 December 2004.

[36] Youssef H. Aboul-Enein and Sherifa Zuhur, *Islamic Rulings on Warfare*, (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, October 2004), 35

[37] Ibid., 36.

[38] Ibid., 4.

[39] Ibid., 7.

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